I Believe in the Girl in the Park

It is the feeling of anxiety, the nervousness of defeat. It is the worry of losing it, of not making it, of failing. It can be the throbbing in your legs, leaving behind traces of black, yellow and blue. Or maybe it’s the harsh sting in the hand that hit first when you fell.

It is also the excitement that builds as you take your approach to the giant mound of vertical snow looming right in front of you. It is the pause of the world, where everything stops for that brief moment as you gaze forward, seeing nothing. It is the rush of the wind in your ears, the silence right before you land. It is the building pleasure that erupts as you hit the ground, stomping the landing feet first. And it is the overall thrill of trying something that could very well kill you if done wrong.

‘It’ is park skiing, also known as new school freestyle skiing, which first became popular in the 1960s, but didn’t become a competitive sport until 1979. The park I refer to is the terrain park on the ski mountain, where most of the skiers are men. Today park skiing has taken huge leaps, but mostly just for the men who compete. Women only recently got to compete in the same events as men, but the numbers competing are much lower for girls. And the gap isn’t only visible in competitions, but also in ski movies and on the mountain.

I was first introduced to the park when I was volunteering as a ski patroller in high school. That was where I met girls who I could ski with, and who were into freestyle skiing. Each time I would simply ski through and not hit a single feature while they would try jumps, boxes, and rails. One day I decided to give it a try myself. I positioned my skies towards a flat box, gave a slight push… and slid right on my side, smacking my thigh into the side edging. Going into the park was intimidating with all these ballsy guys. I realized that if I was going to keep trying, if I would one day be able to do what the guys did, I would need to go in there and continue to suck. And keep sucking in front of them all.

I am always the worst one in the terrain park, and I still don’t try many features. But knowing that I am at least out there and trying gives me the courage to keep going. The point is not how much I fell or what I wasn’t able to do, but rather is it the fact that I gave it a try at all. It is about the audacity it takes for girls to be as involved in freestyle skiing as boys. It is a scary sport for everyone, but girls should have the guts to be daring and attempt what guys attempt. Girls need to gather up the courage to give freestyle skiing and other sports that are primarily male-dominated a try. Don’t be afraid to be the skier chick in the terrain park, even if - especially if - you are the only one.